Comments on the proposed precedence of the specific name of *Euphryne obesus* Baird, 1858 over that of *Sauromalus ater* Duméril, 1856 (Reptilia, Squamata)

(Case 3143; see BZN **58**: 37–40, 229)

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I unconditionally support the application of Montanucci et al. to give precedence to the commonly used specific name of the iguanid lizard *Sauromalus obesus* (Baird, 1858) over the seldom–used name *S. ater* Duméril, 1856. The preponderance of use of the name *S. obesus* in the scientific and popular literature (ca. 550 titles for *S. obesus*, versus 46 titles for *S. ater* of which only 12 are post–1950) gives overwhelming and convincing justification for conservation of *S. obesus*. Failure to do so would result in widespread instability and confusion.

I would like to comment further on another use of the name *S. obesus* not covered by the applicants, namely its use in teaching. The species is widely known for its unusual escape behavior. When disturbed or frightened, an individual retreats into the nearest crevice and wedges itself in place by gulping air and inflating its body. Thus, the animal becomes quite difficult to extract. It shares this remarkable behavioral trait with the pancake tortoise *Malacochersus tornieri* (which has a flexible shell) of East Africa. I have described this unusual behavior (always using the name *S. obesus*) in my courses for 34 years. Thus, thousands of students have learned the name. I suspect that students elsewhere have likewise frequently used the name *S. obesus* in conjunction with its unusual escape behavior.

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I support the arguments of Montanucci et al. to conserve the long used and well known specific name of *Sauromalus obesus* (Baird, 1858) for the famous chuckwalla of the deserts of the United States and Mexico.

I have used the name *Sauromalus obesus* in over a dozen papers on thermoregulation, paleontology, archaeology, social behavior, conservation and indeed folklore. This name is associated with the chuckwalla in many different fields. In addition, the name has been used in such popular magazines as *Arizona Highways* and *National Geographic*. Many books and leaflets sold in national parks, museums and zoos in the southwestern United States have photographs or stories about the chuckwalla and use the name *S. obesus*.

Since the name is so well established in the scientific and lay literature it is my view that *Sauromalus obesus* should be conserved by giving it precedence over *S. ater* Duméril, 1856.

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I write to oppose the proposal of Montanucci et al. to give precedence to the name *Euphryne obesus* Baird, 1858 over its senior synonym *Sauromalus ater* Duméril, 1856. Most biologists, including systematists, dislike the substitution of a familiar name by a senior synonym. Article 23.9 of the Code gives relief when the senior synonym has not been used as a valid name after 1899.

In the present case the species in question was universally called *Sauromalus ater* from Duméril's original 1856 description until 1922. At that time Van Denburgh (1922) decided that two species were involved, and *S. obesus* and *S. ater* were universally regarded as distinct species for a period of 76 years. No one questioned the validity of the two species until Hollingsworth (1998) demonstrated that the two forms were conspecific and properly applied the name of the senior synonym *S. ater* to the single taxon.

During the past 76 years the name of the junior synonym, *S. obesus*, has appeared many more times in the literature than the senior synonym simply because the northern populations (called *S. obesus*) occur in the United States while the southern populations (called *S. ater*) were thought to be a Mexican species. This imbalance in citations reflects the difference in the number of active herpetologists in the two countries, and in turn seriously biases any survey of the literature, such as the one carried out by the authors of this application (para. 6). I question whether the precedence of names should be based on such a factor.

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In the present case, for over 75 years the specific names of *Sauromalus ater* Duméril, 1856 and *S. obesus* (Baird, 1858) were consistently applied to what were thought to be different species, and during that time hundreds of usages of *S. obesus* appeared in the literature (and continue to do so), whereas there were few usages of *S. ater*.

Hollingsworth (1998) demonstrated that in reality the two populations are conspecific. Application of priority would require utilization of the name *S. ater* for the single species. However, inasmuch as retention of the far more widely used *S. obesus* would not in any way conflict with Hollingsworth's findings, the Code's primary objectives of stability and universality would be served by retention of the name *S. obesus* for the species.

If taxonomists were the only ones using these names, stability might be of less concern. But this species is cited in innumerable non–taxonomic works and for the sake of these many users stability is important.

We therefore reiterate our support for the application as it stands.